

Tuesday, September 18, 2012

Santa Fe, NM – Congressman Ben Ray Luján of New Mexico's Third District called a decision today by the Advisory Board on Radiation and Worker Health a step in the right direction to help workers at Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL) who have suffered illnesses as a result of their work at the lab. The board's 12 to 1 decision to recommend compensation for all workers, contractors, and subcontractors who were employed at LANL between 1976 and 1995 is a vital step in the process that has dragged on since the Special Exposure Cohort (SEC) petition was submitted in 2008. Luján attended the board meeting in Denver, Colorado today to urge support for the SEC petition to extend compensation to all service support workers through 2005 who worked in areas with a history of radioactive material use.

"Many of my constituents who have suffered illness and health problems due to their work at LANL have been negatively impacted by the delayed action on this petition," Congressman Luján said. "Today's favorable decision by the board will move this critical process forward and represents a key step toward helping the men and women who played an important support role at LANL. I want to thank Andrew Evaskovich for his tireless efforts on this petition as well as NIOSH and the board for taking action. With hundreds of LANL employees who appear likely to qualify for compensation under a SEC class – and who have been affected by long periods of inaction that have hurt them and their families – today's decision has been long awaited. It is still important, however, that further investigation is done swiftly to support the petition for those who worked at LANL between 1996 and 2005."

Luján has long called for action on the SEC petition. Now that the board has made its recommendation, the Secretary of Health and Human Services will make a final decision regarding the petition. Currently there is a SEC that has been approved for workers from 1942 to 1974. An employee who worked at LANL for a minimum of two years during the time period and has one illness or disease that has been linked to work at LANL will be approved for their claim. SEC-00109 has sought to expand compensation for workers who were not included in the original SEC as well as expand the definition of covered employees to include support services.

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Below are Rep. Luján's remarks as prepared at the board's meeting this afternoon in Denver on SEC-00109:

Good afternoon. I would like to thank the board for this opportunity to share a few words on this important issue that impacts many of my constituents in Northern New Mexico. Thank you for allowing me to share my thoughts with you in June as well. I also want to acknowledge Michelle Jacquez-Ortiz with U.S. Senator Tom Udall's office, who is present today.

I again reiterate my strong support for Special Exposure Cohort Petition 00109 regarding Los Alamos National Laboratory Support Services Workers from January 1, 1976 through December 31, 2005.

Many of my constituents have been negatively affected by the inaction of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) on this petition, and I am hopeful that a favorable decision by the board today will move this process forward and result in an important step toward compensation for workers who have suffered from an illness that was caused by their work at LANL. With hundreds of LANL employees that have come forward thus far who appear likely to qualify for compensation under an SEC class – and who have been affected by long periods of inaction that have hurt them and their families – I appreciate everyone being here today to begin to address this wrong.

While I hope the board will enable workers up to 2005 to receive compensation, the recently revised NIOSH evaluation report recommending the addition of a class of LANL workers to the SEC for the years 1975 through 1995 should make it abundantly clear the need to help the people and families who worked at LANL and were impacted during this time frame.

I will be corresponding with the Director of Los Alamos National Laboratory to seek assurance that they are monitoring and keeping accurate data and records for current and future employees, and that there is 100 percent cooperation and that requested information is made available in a timely fashion to the NIOSH team in respect to the remainder of this petition for workers through 2005.

Once again, thank you for allowing me to address you today, and I urge swift and positive action in favor of SEC-00109. Thank you to everyone who has been a part of this and to Andrew

Evaskovich for having the courage to move this petition forward.

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